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ABSTRACT

Preventive and coping strategies that provide school security include techniques to obtain and analyze data in order to identify trends and to develop a school security needs assessment. Other security measures involve special training for teachers, supervision, and a crisis plan. Administrators who examine and upgrade their schools' security systems may not be able to prevent all crime, but they can protect their schools from liability in court. Ten resources are listed. (MLF)

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By Joan Gaustad

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A twelve-year-old repeatedly teased by other students brings a gun to school, shoots another child, and kills himself. A knife-wielding intruder mugs a teacher in the men's room. Flying bullets from a neighboring housing project force the evacuation of a high school's playing field.

Events such as these disrupt the learning environment schools try to provide, filling students and staff with fear and endangering their lives. Fortunately, a variety of preventive and coping strategies can help beleaguered teachers and administrators both to protect the school facilities and to safeguard the people who use them.

## How Can a District Assess Its School Security Needs?

As Peter Blauvelt (1987) states, "A school administrator cannot control unwanted and unacceptable behavior without timely and accurate security data." He details a procedure for data recording, including a sample "Incident Profile Form" on which the exact nature, time and place of the offense, descriptions of the offender and victim, and actions taken by the school are recorded.

Robert J. Rubel, director of the National Alliance for Safe Schools (NASS), has developed a "Process Guide" that adapts crime analysis techniques to the school environment, reports Valerie Smith (1984). Disciplinary infractions and incidents of crime are documented and coded according to parameters similar to Blauvelt's. The data can then be analyzed "to identify patterns or trends and to develop intervention and prevention strategies," Smith says. Using these techniques, Duval County Public Schools in Florida identified the noon hour as the time of most thefts. Shortening the lunch period and posting off-limits areas dramatically decreased petty thefts (Smith 1984).

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) presents examples of "Model Report Systems" developed by five school districts and gives suggestions for assessment and reporting systems (AASA 1981).

## What Preventive Security Measures Are Effective?

Alarm systems can effectively reduce vandalism and burglaries. Due to the expense of installation and operation, Lanny R. Gamble and his colleagues (1987) emphasize the importance of careful planning to choose a cost-effective system appropriate to the particular school. They suggest that after surveying the equipment available, administrators should consult a qualified engineer with no vested interest before making a decision.

Metal detectors are expensive and controversial. In a 1988 New York City pilot program, security guards checked for weapons with hand-held metal detectors. No guns were confiscated in the schools, but approximately 200 weapons were found nearby, apparently dropped by students when they saw the detectors (Suzanne Harper 1989). A Detroit program using metal detectors was challenged legally and ultimately abandoned, "partly because of the difficulties in herding students through the gates in time for class" (Del Stover 1988).

Traditional methods can help protect school property and personnel without a large initial investment. The systematic use of heavy-duty locks, special key-handling procedures, fencing, identification cards, hall passes, and visitor policies is called "target hardening" (Gamble and others). Blauvelt gives a number of crime-prevention tips, ranging from inventory procedures to suggesting teachers collect money during the first period if students bring money to school for a special purpose.

Supervision is important both in controlling student problems and in preventing intrusions. Schools may assign staff to patrol halls or cafeterias, have parents and community volunteers monitor reception areas, or hire security guards. New York City spends $43 million on a 2,050-member security staff (Stover). A police liaison program proved highly successful at Rich East High School in Park Forest, Illinois. In addition to providing security, the officers served as a source of expertise for school officials and developed friendly relations with students (Moriarty and Fitzgerald 1989).

## How Can Attitudes and Behavior Be Changed to Make Schools Safer?

First of all, it is important to establish clear, consistent discipline in the school environment. Greenbaum states, "High expectations, respect, trust and positive reinforcement of good behavior are found consistently in schools demonstrating good discipline. . . .If, on the other hand, the atmosphere is one of hostility and insensitivity in which students are continually subjected to criticism and failure, serious disciplinary problems and criminal behaviors are likely to erupt." Stover describes the principal's role in setting the tone of a school, including encouraging cooperation among staff members, being personally visible, promoting student involvement, and seeing that students and staff with personal problems get help.

Raising security consciousness is also important. Blauvelt suggests discussing security with both students and staff and involving the entire school community in identifying security problems and formulating plans to cope with them. Emergency drills can prepare both students and staff to react to a crisis (Harper).

Cooperation between school and community is important. "You need a multifaceted, comprehensive approach that involves students, teachers, administrators, parents, community leaders, and the police and courts,"

says Ronald Stephens of NASS (Stover).

Reaching out to students with violent tendencies and teaching them basic social skills is a promising preventive measure. A twenty-two-year research project at the University of Illinois at Chicago showed that eight-year-olds who displayed aggressive, antisocial behaviors were much more likely to commit crimes as adults, and transmitted their own aggressive tendencies to their children (Stuart Greenbaum 1989). Greenbaum cites evidence suggesting that educators can help break this vicious cycle. For example, an antibullying campaign initiated in 1983 in Norway reduced bullying and victim problems by 50 percent in two years.

Teachers may not be equipped to teach conflict resolution or to deal with violent youths. As William Wayson states, "There are tricks of the trade that teachers don't learn. They don't look into the eyes of students to see if they're on drugs or angry, so they move in too close and violate personal space" (Stover).

Special training can help give teachers the tools they need. Greenbaum recommends techniques for discouraging aggressive behavior, teaching appropriate skills instead, and coping with violence when it occurs. Walter Doyle reviews classroom management techniques, and Edmund Emmer and Amy Aussiker survey the effectiveness of four classroom discipline programs (Oliver Moles 1989).

### What if Preventive Measures Fail?

Despite careful efforts, acts of violence will occur. Each school should have a written crisis plan assigning staff members specific roles in case of emergency (Harper). Most authors agree all schools should have intercom systems. School officials should have plans for communicating with "students, parents, staff, law enforcement personnel, emergency medical services, the media and hospitals" (Harper).

Clumsy handling of the aftermath of a crisis may cause additional trauma to victims. June Feder (1989) reports on assaulted New York City school staff members. While emotionally vulnerable and often injured, victims were typically shuffled from room to room, given lengthy forms to fill out, and given little emotional support. Later, fellow staff often treated victims insensitively, unconsciously denying that violence could happen to them. Administrators should educate themselves and staff about victims' emotional needs before an assault occurs.

An entire community may need therapeutic care after a crisis such as the shooting at Cleveland Elementary School in Stockton, California. School systems should determine what mental health resources are available in case of such an event. The NSSC recommends that schools be kept open for counseling and information for several days after a traumatic event, and that counseling services be made available for months, to school staff and administrators as well as to parents and children (Harper).

### What Is the School District's Legal Responsibility?

Henry Lufler suggests that during the "Litigation Explosion" of the '70s, pessimistic expectations about court intervention "may have caused school personnel to become overly cautious when dealing with discipline...issues" (Moles). In reality, Lufler points out that threats outnumbered actual lawsuits, and the initial filing of unusual suits was more widely publicized than their generally unsuccessful final outcomes.

A number of court cases in the '80s produced rulings that stressed schools' responsibility for students' safety. Schools are expected to provide a physical environment that suits the purposes of an intellectual institution (Harper). Administrators who examine their security systems and take conscientious steps to safeguard students and staff may not be able to prevent all crime, but they can protect their schools from liability in court (Harper).

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